



# FROM OPPRESSION TO EMPOWERMENT: YAJNASENI, A STORY OF DRAUPADI' S LIBERATION

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## ABSTRACT

This study, 'From Oppression to Empowerment: Yajnaseni, A story of Draupadi's Liberation', offers a critical feminist examination of Mahabharata, shedding light on Draupadi's transformative journey. Despite being a pivotal figure in the epic, Mahabharata, Draupadi's significance has been marginalized within the epic narrative. Vysa, a patriarchal writer has failed to give an authentic image of Draupadi. Pratibha Ray's novel, Yajnaseni, presents a poignant epistolary account of Draupadi's life. Through this intimate narrative, Ray highlights Draupadi's unacknowledged sacrifices in her relentless pursuit of Dharma, which are systematically obscured by the patriarchal discourses.

### Aims :

1. To analyse the ways in which Yajnaseni challenges patriarchal narratives in the Mahabharata.
2. To examine the representation of Draupadi in Pratibha Ray's Yajnaseni, highlighting its feminist implications.
3. To explore the themes of agency, empowerment and sacrifice in Draupadi's character.

### OBJECTIVES:

1. In this paper I will explain in detail how Yajnaseni reimages Draupadi's story through a feminist perspective.
2. This study examines how Yajnaseni challenges traditional gender norms through its portrayal of Draupadi.
3. This paper investigates, how Yajnaseni reclaims Draupadi's voice and experiences, subverting traditional patriarchal interpretation.

**KEYWORDS:** Yajnaseni, Feminist, Patriarchal Discourse, Marginalized, Dharma

## INTRODUCTION

Ancient Indian Literature is said to be the most venerable literature of the world. Epics, a hallmark of Sanskrit literature, represent some of the oldest and most revered classics of ancient India. These are the expression of a country's literary and cultural traditions, which have an everlasting impact on all the generations. Yajnaseni: The story of Draupadi (1984) is an Odia novel by Pratibha Ray, retelling the story of Draupadi from the Mahabharata. The word 'Yajnaseni' means a woman born out of fire. The novel is set in the backdrop of Mahabharata. The story revolves around Draupadi, who is married to five brothers - Yudhishtira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva. The novel explores the lives of Draupadi and her husbands, as they navigate the complexities of their relationships and societal expectations.

In this novel, Pratibha Ray challenges traditional patriarchal narratives, offering a nuanced exploration of Draupadi's experiences, agency and empowerment. In this paper, we will examine the feminist implications of Yajnaseni, focusing on Draupadi's representation. In this paper we will also analyse the ways in which Yajnaseni challenges patriarchal narratives in the Mahabharata.

## DISCUSSION

### Yajnaseni: a Story of Draupadi's Liberation

"The fault is his who has filled woman with beauty and men's eyes with the thirst for beauty" (Yajnaseni 233)

Pratibha Ray's 'Yajnaseni' is a nuanced retelling of the Mahabharata, focusing on the episodes featuring Draupadi. Ray has transformed the epic plot into a fictional autobiography of Draupadi which is written in the form of an elaborate epistle addressed to Krishna by Draupadi. Ray reimagines Draupadi as a woman with a contemporary mindset and strong desire to serve society.

Ray's narrative adheres to the original epic while introducing subtle twists to highlight Draupadi's agency and empowerment. Draupadi emerges as a woman with a strong desire to serve society. Yajnaseni extends beyond Draupadi's character, shedding light on the collective suffering of women. Ray critiques the objectification and exploitation of women, underscoring its detrimental impact on their honor and dignity.

Through her 'blood-drenched' autobiography, Draupadi seeks catharsis by sharing her trials and sufferings with Krishna and readers. This epistolary novel, written as a lengthy letter at the end of her life, recounts her experiences as a woman, wife and mother. The novelist has not followed the chronological

sequence of the epic but has selected the events in which Draupadi is involved.

In Yajnaseni, Pratibha Ray reinterprets the character of Draupadi, challenging negative perceptions surrounding her polyandrous status. In this novel Ray explores Draupadi's inner world, revealing her emotions, dreams and anguish, which is absent in the original Mahabharata. Ray exposes the female psyche of Draupadi, through her renders voice to the suffering of many of the women characters such as Sathyavati, Amba, Madri, Gandhari and Uttara. Throughout the novel Draupadi's spiritual intimacy with Krishna is re-emphasised.

Ray's Draupadi poignantly tells Krishna and reader that her suffering has been beyond tolerance and she does not want anyone else to experience this.

The trauma and pain is described by her thus \_\_\_\_\_

‘Seeing each hair-raising incident of my life the people of kaliyuga will be able to decide whether the insults Draupadi suffered have ever been borne by woman of anytime. God forbid that in future anyone should suffer such abuse’ ( Yajnaseni -4)

In Pratibha Ray's Yajnaseni, Draupadi endures the emotional pain of rejection by Krishna and resignedly accepts Arjuna as her husband, believing her purpose is to uphold Dharma.

When the news of the pandava's supposed demise reaches her, Draupadi attempts to halt the Swayamvar. However, her brother Dhristadyumna explains to her the impending danger of cancelling the Swayamvar, Panchal will be defeated by the collective strength of the assembled kings. So Draupadi is forced to accept the Swamyavar.

With a deep sigh she says, ‘ I would have remained on unwed, virgin as it is! ’ ( Yajnaseni – 34)

Ray's Draupadi revolts against making a mockery of her polyandrous marriage. She furiously questions the discrimination in the moral standards to mention and women. Draupadi realises that being a woman means sufferings. She ponders over the fact that even Sathyavathi and Amba are also victims of male members.

In Yajnaseni only a few pages are devoted for the description of war. Ray has thought that war is male – oriented and she has not given much importance to that. Being a humanist, she dislikes war and she feels that the war part of the epic is not her focus. She reveals her dislike for war through Draupadi. Even though initially Draupadi is portrayed as a woman with thirst for war, towards the end, Ray voices the futility of war through Draupadi.

Pratibha Ray's Draupadi embodies universal harmony, brotherhood and racial amity. In the novel Draupadi advocates the need for integration of the Aryans and Non- Aryans and is seen working for Education and uplift of marginalized communities. She is also pictured as a woman who has

understood the futility of accumulating wealth, who rejects and renounces all jewelry and riches for the cause of human welfare. Her administrative wisdom is shown when she suggests that road should be built linking the forests and the city of Hastinapur. In this novel Draupadi is seen to requesting Kuber to utilize wealth for infrastructural development.

## CONCLUSION

Pratibha Ray's Yajnaseni offers a transformative feminist reinterpretation of the Mahabharata, recentering Draupadi as powerful symbol of female agency, resilience and compassion. By subverting traditional depictions, Ray Challenges patriarchal norms and stereotypes. In this novel Ray also emphasizing Draupadi's emotions, desires and autonomy. Ray also highlights women's struggles, suffering and strength as well. Pratibha Ray embodies Draupadi's self empowerment and assertiveness. Through this novel, Ray advocates for gender equality and social justice. Ray also redefines the traditional feminist roles. Through the novel, Yajnaseni, Pratibha Ray reinterprets the epic Mahabharata, elevating Draupadi's as an exemplary feminist icon. This retelling transform Draupadi's character into a powerful and pivotal force, showcasing her unwavering courage and resilience. So, undoubtedly Yajnaseni presents a refreshing perspective on the Mahabharata, redefining Draupadi as an icon of female empowerment.

## REFERENCES

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